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Recommended Citation

Zukowski '12, Sylvia, "New Peace Garden Brings Fresh Food to Community" (2012). *News and Events*. Paper 1997.
<http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/1997>

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New Peace Garden Brings Fresh Food to Community

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – When strolling through the produce section at a grocery store or harvesting a home garden, many of us hope to find sweet strawberries, plump tomatoes and buttery lettuce. However, there are members of the Bloomington-Normal community that do not have access to fresh produce or have the space to grow a garden.

At Illinois Wesleyan, Ryan Dyar, Class of 2014 and Danny Kenny, Class of 2013, are promoting community connectedness and trying to make produce accessible to all through an IWU Peace Garden, located at Francis Street and Prospect Avenue.



Danny Kenny '13, left, and Ryan Dyar '14 work in the garden.

In the spring of 2012, Dyar, a political science major from Danville, Ill., and Kenny, an environmental studies and Hispanic studies double major from Wildwood, Mo., were named Weir Fellows. The Weir Fellowship, distributed through Illinois Wesleyan's [Action Research Center](#) (ARC), links Illinois Wesleyan students with research projects for community-based not-for-profit organizations. "While working on our respective projects through the Weir Fellowship, we became familiar with the concept of a campus garden," said Dyar. "Previous students and faculty, specifically Professor of Political Science William Munro, had talked extensively about having a garden on campus and the idea was set in motion when we started working with ARC," said Kenny.

Once Dyar and Kenny decided to have a garden at Illinois Wesleyan, they began to work with Carl Teichman, director of government and community relations, and James Simeone, associate professor of political science, among others, to obtain a plot of land.



After tireless lease negotiations and garden planning sessions, the IWU Peace Garden became a reality when Dyar's shovel hit the ground in April. "Getting used to gardening was difficult, it is truly labor intensive," said Dyar. From preparing the soil to planting seeds, Dyar and Kenny experienced hands-on learning. "Understanding how to plant and how to prune is truly a science," said Kenny.

Though the IWU Peace Garden was merely a concept in January 2012, today it is bustling with

student and faculty volunteers, covered in greenery, and quickly exceeding everyone's expectations. For Dyar and Kenny, the expectations of the garden go beyond just growing food. "The garden is an opportunity for interdisciplinary interaction, as well as community bonding," said Dyar.

While the IWU Peace Garden continues to flourish — producing vegetables ranging from over 20 types of tomato plants to pumpkins, beets, and a variety of herbs — discussions on what to do with the harvest continue. "We have donated some of the produce to Clare House, a local food pantry" said Dyar, "and we will give our potatoes and herbs to Sodexo, Illinois Wesleyan's food service provider, to be used on campus during the school year." Food harvested from the garden will also be distributed to the Bloomington-Normal community. "We hope to have a veggie cart to give produce to residents in the surrounding community as well," said Kenny.

"If I come back in three years and do not recognize the garden, that will be awesome," said Kenny, who hopes the garden is larger next year and that more students become involved. In the future, Dyar has plans to double the garden by adding seven additional rows for planting, as well as building a meditation area and a hoop house. "We hope to build a hoop house, which is basically a greenhouse, so that we can start planting earlier next year," said Dyar.

Dyar and Kenny also hope to continue the interdisciplinary nature of the garden. "We would love to have students and faculty from all disciplines get involved. Recently, the IWU School of Art provided student-designed posters for the garden, and we hope to work with the Illinois State University co-op, and we were recently contacted by the teachers involved with the Normal Community High School garden," said Kenny.

"We cannot wait to see how far we, as well as future students, can take this concept of a campus garden," said Dyar and Kenny.

For additional information, contact the Action Research Center, visit the IWU Peace Garden's [Facebook page](#), or send an email to IWUpeacegarden@iwu.edu.

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